

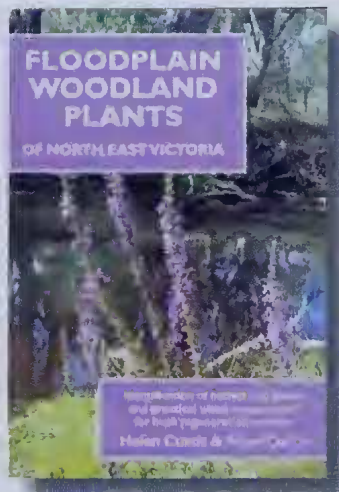
Floodplain Woodland Plants of North East Victoria: Identification of natives and weeds and practical weed management for bush regeneration projects

by Helen Curtis and Peter Curtis

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Wherever you travel in Victoria you see evidence of revegetation projects, commonly marked by armies of triangular plastic sleeves enclosing shrubs and saplings. This book stems from one such undertaking: the restoration, by the Wangaratta Urban Landcare Group, of Kaluna Park, 5.2 ha of degraded riverine forest in the heart of Wangaratta. In 1995 it was 'an impenetrable jungle of exotic trees, shrubs and ground cover weeds ... a neglected unmanaged wasteland.' After 13 years of Thursday morning work sessions by the group (which includes Helen and Peter Curtis; it's not altogether clear how many others), gone are the weeds such as Box Elder, Hawthorn, Privet, Honeysuckle, Blackberry and Wandering Jew. And in their place: 'the majesty and beauty of the old Red Gums, the maturing of the young ones, the native seedling regeneration, the mossy logs, the vistas through the woodland ...'

Two thirds of the book focuses on identification of the native and weed species that the Group dealt with, separated into Trees; Herbs and Climbers; and Grasses and Grasslike Plants. An additional seven pages provide side-by-side photographs and distinctive features of native and alien 'look-alikes', such as Windmill Grass (native) and Couch Grass (weed). Throughout, names of natives are printed in green; those of weeds, in red: smart idea! For each species scientific and family names are given, with a brief description including growth form, flowering season and characteristics of fruits and seeds. For natives there are comments on particular values such as riverbank stabilisation or provision of food or habitat for fauna; for weeds, how they are dispersed and how they can be managed. There are up to five colour photographs and in some cases drawings of every species listed.



Methods of weed management are indicated by brief acronyms; details are spelled out on pages 82-89, with special cautions about the use of herbicides. But coverage is not limited to spraying; methods and equipment for hand-removal, smothering with black plastic, injecting and cutting-and-painting are described and illustrated in sufficient detail to allow you to tackle them even if you lack experience. The remainder of the book provides a brief history of the project, with spectacular before-and-after photographs and useful advice on planting, working methods and ongoing maintenance.

Do I wish I'd had this book when I began my own revegetation project in north-east Victoria? Emphatically, 'Yes'. But what if you live elsewhere and are not involved in bushland restoration work: will the book be of interest to you? I'd say 'Yes' again. Many of the natives and weeds are widespread; similarly, the principles of landscape restoration and weed control are universal in their application. But there is a special pleasure to be found in the book just because it has been so intelligently put together: spiral binding so that it opens flat; attractive design; comprehensive illustration; clear, practical advice. No-one with an interest in nature, I suspect, could fail to be heartened by what this small group of enthusiasts has achieved. Inspirational project – inspirational book!

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